



## Colonial Subjugation and Power Appropriation in Yvonne Vera's Works



### Research article

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#### Abstract

In spite of continuous research on colonial subjugation and power appropriation, little investigation has been carried out to interrogate the impact of colonialism on African men and how their narratives frame the lived experiences of the women in their societies on Yvonne Vera's works. This study focusses on how men's desire for power and control has forced them to try and conquer, subjugate, dominate and oppress women. Further, the study interrogates how the colonial laws edge the African man from the patriarchal power centre and how they project their frustrations and bitterness on women. This study therefore employed feminist and Mitchell Foucault's thoughts on power in order to elucidate how the colonial disempowerment of African men forces them to vent their anger on women. The study found out that as men struggle to gain their patriarchal glory, they use repressive patriarchal policies and laws to subdue the weaker female characters whereby they end up destroying women as well as themselves. Further, the study reveals that in spite of the patriarchal injustices on women, men fails to gain their patriarchal glory.

**Keywords:** appropriation, patriarchy, power, subjugation, women, Yvonne Vera

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## 1.0 Introduction

Within the confines of power paradigms, the power bar is always tilted so that one end is more elevated than the other. In African context, at a point in time, both Africans and Europeans exercised power. The European invasion of the continent resulted in material exploitation and cultural domination of the Africans by the Europeans. The African resistance did not stop the invasion; rather it brought disillusionment to them. Dominated by the colonial laws that seek to capitalize “civilization”, European supremacy and the destruction of African cultures, the Africans became subjugated. The colonial subjugation of the African man brought double oppression to the African woman. A number of scholars have come up with various perspectives on colonialism and subjugation, for example, the word colonialism is defined by Brar and Brar (2012) as:

a form of imperialism based on maintaining a sharp and fundamental distinction between the ruling nations and the colonized populations. It is based on factitious racial differences and always entails unequal rights. It regulated itself in a different form of imperial powers to subordinate and exploit their dependencies.

What emerges from Brar’s definition is that colonialism entails domination, exploitation and subjugation. It therefore means that colonialism breeds subjugation and the two words are sides of a coin. According to Karl-Marx, as quoted in Brar (2012):

colonialism is a stage in a development of the complex phenomenon of capitalism and the manufacturing industry so that it is not only a historical reality of African history but also worked as a socio-economic and ideological farce that evolved and progressed under the basic principle of alienation of African natives from their traditional value system and pattern of life (Brar, 2012:583).

It is evident that the powers that colonized Africans were more interested in depleting African resources by enriching themselves. They did these by disabling the African traditional value system, subordinating the African man who was the custodian of the African wealth and taking away what rightfully belonged to him. Karl-Marx’s thoughts seem to be shared by other scholars like Aime’ Cesaire (2010) who refers to colonialism as “a great historical tragedy” that befell Africa in its encounter with Europeans. He concludes that “Europe is responsible before the human community for the highest heap of corpses in human history” (as quoted in Butt, 2009:2). I read the above definitions of colonialism as a system characterized by exploitation, domination,

subordination or subjugation. The word subordinate, according to Gayatri Spivak is coined from the term “subaltern”, derived from the Latin word “sub”, meaning below or under, plus “alternus” meaning alternate, which comes to “subalternus” meaning subordinate or subjugated. The word subaltern or what I use loosely to refer to the subjugated in this research is mainly used to describe a lower ranking or inferior individual. This position is strengthened by Nanda Silima (2013) who observes that the word subaltern or subjugate came to be used broadly to represent subordination in social, political, religious and economic hierarchies in twentieth and twenty-first centuries, under Marxism, nationalism, post colonialism and feminism theories. In Spivak’s view, subaltern women are subjected to more oppression than subaltern men. The observations advanced by the above scholars speak to the concerns of this chapter which is to interrogate the impact of colonialism on the African men and how their narratives frame the lived experiences of the women in their society. The colonial administration in Zimbabwe created a new order which came with an enforcement of new laws and socio-cultural reforms that edged the African man from the patriarchal power centre. Emasculated of land ownership, political and social responsibilities that define him, the man is forced into a more tempered and docile form of his former self. This has punctured the man’s masculinity and manhood and forced him to create strategies of survival as a patriarchal man. I argue that the overwhelming magnitude of the man’s need for power and control has driven him to engage in oppressive actions when dealing with the woman. In his book *The Fall* (2015), Steve Taylor makes an important observation about male subjugation and oppression of women:

That their desire for power and control has driven men to try to conquer and subjugate, dominate and oppress the women. Since men feel the need to gain as much power and control as they can, they steal away power and control from the women. They deny them the right to make decisions so that they can make them for them, leaving women unable to direct their own lives so that they can direct their lives for them (Taylor, 2015:87).

Taylor’s thoughts exemplify the thrust of this chapter’s concerns with men’s subjugation and their power manipulations on women so that as Spivak puts it, women are more subjugated than the men. The chapter interrogates the impact of European invasion on African men and how the men tried to vent their anger on women. The colonial system in Zimbabwe has alienated the African man from his own world, leaving him confused and vulnerable, and subject to its authority. Haunted by this underdog position, man has appropriated whatever little power he has left to oppress the woman as a means of reverting to his patriarchal kingdom. The complexity of this power play is

the focus of this chapter. As has been insinuated above, I interrogate how Vera's subjugated male characters appropriate power as a way of asserting their battered masculinity and the discourse that informs their actions. The interrogation is done under feminist and Michel Foucault's thoughts on power. Foucault (1982) discusses a form of power that:

Applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own individuality, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals its subjects: subject to someone else by control and dependence; the kind of power which subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault, 1982).

The colonial influence in the world of Vera's novels exposes the society as embracing a form of power that categorizes individuals and assign them dual markings; colonized or colonizer, superior or inferior, man or woman. This form of power subjugates the less endowed members of the society and makes them subjects to the authority that control and make them dependent. On one hand, the female characters are subjugated and are struggling under the oppressive yoke of patriarchy as well as colonialism. The male characters on the other hand are struggling to survive under the colonial systems that have denied them their economic, political and socio-cultural practices. Millett (1970) foregrounds the perception of this form of power when she states that:

The root cause of women's oppression is buried deep in patriarchy's gender system. Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant roles while the women contend with the subordinate ones. This ideology is particularly powerful because through conditioning men usually secure the consent of the very women they oppress (Millett, 1970).

Vera's critical appraisal of patriarchal gender system in her works echoes Millett's thesis above. The system assigns dominant roles to men, which in turn assure them superior positions. Men, thus, are used to being on top including towering above women. Nevertheless, this seemingly absolute power centre occupied by the patriarchal male in Africa collapses under the weight of colonial invasion of Africa. The African men had to play second fiddle to colonial masters and this disempowering of the African men is well captured in Vera's novels. They got subjugated and had to surrender not only their 'superior' birthrights but also their land and had to become squatters whose survival

depended on hard labour, physical and psychological torture, and sometimes fighting wars that they didn't fully understand; a fact that made them bitter and enraged. The men ventilated their frustrations by directing their rage on unsuspecting women who then suffered double oppression in their relationships with them. I now wish to interrogate the impact of colonial administration on men's power aggression towards women. A force that manifests itself through his social relations in a negative manner drives the man under interrogation. The male characters presented in Vera's novels seem to care less about societal morals. They are incestuous rapists, murderers, sex exploiters, self-centered, frustrated power hungry men who relieve their anger on women. This narrative strand is depicted through a number of Vera's male characters as in the case of Sibaso in the *Stone Virgins*. Sibaso murders Thenjiwe and raps her twin sister Nonceba. In Vera's other novels like *Under the Tongue*, Muroiywa has an incestuous sexual relationship with his daughter Zhizha. Runyararo murders her husband Muroiywa to avenge the daughter's incestuous rape. It is significant to interrogate the impact of colonialism on the actions of the man we have referred to in this chapter as the "subjugated male" because his type forms the significant majority in the society they live in. Since he is not capable of shielding himself from humiliations and harsh realities of life under the administrative systems of colonialism, he appropriates power at every opportune time and use it destructively both on self and on those he perceives weaker, like the women.

### **The Narrative Interspersion of the Traditional and Colonial Power Systems**

In the world of Vera's novels, the white man has created systems that have changed the traditional order of things. The traditional man who previously controlled and managed his socio-economic life becomes the controlled and the managed. The Whiteman scoffed at his ways of doing things as uncivilized and inferior. He felt that the land was too good to be owned and managed by the black man so he took control and made the black man a quarter and a labourer in his own land, making him subject to his authority. In Vera's *Nehanda*, for example, a black elder observes: "who are these strangers....these gold hunters? Our men helped them hunt for gold, and we thought they would leave. Now they hunt us out of our land" (*Nehanda*, 66). The realization that the Whiteman had exploited their good nature and gullibility, dawned on the African men when the damage had already been done. Their attempts to understand the Whiteman and sort out their problems got frustrated. The frustrations turned the Africans into bitter beings, defeated and confused. Despite the formidable leadership of Mbuya Nehanda, they suffered humiliation and defeat as articulated in the following rhetorical questions:

Is this what our ancestors prepared us for? Did they prepare us for death among them? Do you already feel shame to claim what is your? Do not submit to the unknown wisdom of strange tongues. Those who submitted to the spirit of the stranger have brought an abomination to the land. Can we defeat an enemy whose god is already in our midst? (Nehanda, 66)

Feeling subdued and overpowered, they apportion blame to their ancestors as well as themselves for lack of preparedness. The once powerful African man who was bequeathed unchecked power by traditional patriarchal systems now has to serve the white man and call him master against his wish. The case of Mashoko, christened Moses, is a good example:

Moses serves Mr. Browning, a white administrator, as a cook and home worker. He loathes his servant position but can do nothing about it because he feels defeated. Instead, Mashoko exercises his domineering powers on his woman back in his own home whenever he gets the chance: when he is in his village, he feels ashamed of it. If it were not for the hut-taxes that he is being made to pay, he would not accept the work. His cattle will be confiscated if he fails to pay the money asked of him (Nehanda, 46).

Evidenced here is the colonial disempowerment of the African male. Mashoko has been divested of his male power under patriarchy, and forced to take up alien duties meant for women like cooking and housekeeping. The new order has brought down his value to the status of a woman so that he must serve instead of being served. Mashoko has become an absent husband to his wife and absent father to his children. His wife who is already disadvantaged as a voiceless being under patriarchy is now exposed to marriage insecurity occasioned by the colonial system, making her suffering double. The suffering of Mashoko's wife is good example of the double oppression the African women underwent under the colonial system. The system has assigned Mashoko duties that ensure his absence from his family. He has to work to pay for the system's taxes and feed his family. Mashoko's behavior, though obligated, affirms Vera's concern with the subjugated African man. He is subject to Mr. Browning's authority and though he hates himself for it, he has to tolerate him for his survival. Mashoko cherishes the times he spends with his wife back in the village. This is so not because he loves her but rather because it gives him the opportunity to exercise his domineering male authority over her; a space handed down to him by his ancestors under the patronage of patriarchal ideology. The Whiteman understands the African man's attitude towards women. They are considered inferior and valueless. A French feminist Simone De Bourvior (1949)

views men's attitude as occasioned by the fact that they control the society so that they influence how things are done including the handling of women. Mr. Browning uses this stance to disregard Nehanda's leadership ability and to scheme on how to handle the men. He observes thus:

I doubt that the natives can listen to an old woman like her. What can she tell them? This society has no respect for women, whom they treat like children. A woman has nothing to say in the life of the natives. Nothing at all (Nehanda, 75).

Mr. Browning sees leadership vacuum at the African resistance front. He is confident of establishing a British among them with little opposition. Contrary to Mr. Browning's perception, both the natives and the whitemen differently due to her claimed spiritual connections to the underworld treat Nehanda. The African men's acceptance of her is influenced by their belief in the spirit of the old Mboya Nehanda so that they don't see the woman in her. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that their acceptance of Nehanda is because they have been emasculated and feel defenseless so that they are ready to rally behind anyone who has the courage to face the colonial army. Whatever the case, I argue that through Nehanda, women have demonstrated that they are fearless and can confront any situation however difficult. They have also defined in their own terms the true identity of a woman as herself not as they are constructed by the patriarchal society. This is what a feminist critic, Kate Millett (1960s) encourages when she says that:

Women must disenfranchise the power centre of their culture: male dominance. By so doing, women will be able to establish female social conventions as defined by females, not males and in the process, they themselves will shape and articulate female discourse, literary studies and feminist theory (Bressler, 2007).

This kind of move by the women culmination of the subjugation of the black man by the white masters is experienced when Kaguvi and Nehanda are captured and hanged. In his cell before he is hanged, Kaguvi feels desperate and confused. The power of the lion that has always been his strength, as per the native beliefs, leaves him. The narrator says:

The spirit departs in regretful spasms that send Kaguvi crawling from one corner of the room to the next. The blood-feeding spirit roars as it leaves him. Kaguvi's forehead streams with water. His ears sing with deafening

pulsating blood. After the ceaseless pounding in his head, and the burning in his stomach, Kaguvi understands. His name will utterly destroy him. No one can walk away from the departed free and whole. Kaguvi weeps (Nehanda, 108)

It is evident here that the black man's power cannot hold before the Whiteman's authority. The intensity of the humiliation suffered by Kaguvi was so great that even his male spirit departed from him. A man as utterly defeated as Kaguvi is dangerous to both the self and any weaker being around him. Kaguvi attributes his suffering to ancestors whom he feels he has disappointed. His confinement in the cell controls him from trying to rekindle his male authority through women. The African man, referred to in this chapter as the "subjugated man", is as significant in the world of Vera's novels as he is to the current society. In his frustration and bitterness, he overtly manipulates the instruments of patriarchal power for his perverted personal fulfillment. He uses resistance as a chemical catalyst to exercise his own power over those he considers weak, inferior and voiceless. Just as Millett (1970) observes:

Men use the patriarchal ideology to secure consent of women and that "should a woman refuse to accept the patriarchal ideology and should she manifest her mistrust by casting off her femininity, that is, her submissiveness/subordination, men will use coercion to accomplish what conditioning has failed to achieve. Intimidation is everywhere in patriarchy (Millett, 1970:96).

Fumbatha in Vera's *Butterfly Burning* for example, is a self-possessed man who, in his underdog position tries to possess Phephelaphi, a woman he claims to be madly in love with but whom he just uses to salvage his male virility and revert to the power of patriarchy; power that controls and possesses:

He never wanted to let her go even though they were strangers. He could never free her, even if she rose and disappeared once more into the water. He would remember her. He would hold her. Fumbatha had never wanted to possess anything, except the land beneath his feet from which birth served him. Perhaps if he had not been born the land would still belong to him. The death of his father had not heralded birth. Fumbatha had never met a woman who helps him forget each of his footsteps on this ground he longed for. (*Butterfly*, 28-29).



Fumbatha equates Phephelaphi with land and sees in her a dwelling and a substitute for the land he had lost. He hopes, by holding on to Phephelaphi, he would transform his pathetic defeated state to something more meaningful and rekindle his male power that dominates and possesses. Fumbatha, like most men in Bulawayo city, Makokoba Township, suffer from hard labour and indignation in the service of the colonial administration. The work is not their own, it is summoned, the time is not theirs, it is seized (Butterfly, 5). The colonial government has snatched all that they ever owned or inherited from their ancestors, apart from women. They work under the surveillance of the colonialist's administration. This intense subjugation is expected to burst into a resistance against the unbearable atrocities unleashed by the hegemonic power. Ironically, this is not the case in Bulawayo. The men here have resigned to their fate and chosen to put up a unique kind of resistance to lessen the colonial pain. They use kwela music to soothe their battered souls and enable them go through their lives of hardship. These men survive by performing hard labour under strict controlled conditions. They operate under a system of power that Michel Foucault (1970) describes as the way of power over bodies. He says that the Power relations have an immediate hold upon the body, where it gets invested, torturing and forcing the body to carry out tasks and perform ritualistic ceremonies. According to him:

This kind of hold, in the capitalist economy is used to force bodies to a new kind of labour, to extract productive service from them. This involves an actual 'incorporation' of power into the bodies of individuals, controlling their acts and attitudes, and behavior from within (Foucault, 1970:150).

In the same vain, Vera's male characters are controlled from within. Their labor is exploited and controlled. Despite their conformity to the rules, these men are not even allowed to walk on the pavements which they themselves sweep and keep clean. They live within the cracks, unnoticed and unnoticeable, offering every service but with the capacity to vanish when the task required is accomplished narrator describes the situation thus:

Bulawayo is not a city for idleness. The idea is to live within the cracks, unnoticed and unnoticeable, offering every service but with the capacity to vanish when the task required is accomplished. So the black people learn how to move through the city with speed and due attention, to bow their heads down and slide past walls, to walk without making the shadow more pronounced than the body or the body clearer than the shadow. It

means leaning against some masking reality, they lean on walls, on lies, on music (Butterfly, 6)

The men's predicament is humanly unbearable and harrowing. They have been made subjects, subdued and subjugated. They move around like zombies because they are treated with scorn and humiliation which lodge in their psyche, robbing them of their dignity making them liars, selfish, criminals and worthless. The men reverted to kwela music as a means of drowning their frustrations and moving on. They live in the moment and for the moment they are alive. While some men live through these difficult conditions, others just drop dead with people around them pretending to care less, especially because they are considered to have no value. The dead man becomes his own wife's burden because she has to take away the body:

The man dies... the dead man's wife finally brings a wheelbarrow and carries him home, after asking the gathered people if they have never seen a dead man before. They respect her loss and keep silent. The tragedy is her exclusive property, they know, but the absurdity is not. After she has disappeared from view and hearing distance they inquire about the quality of a man who has died (Butterfly, 43).

The man no longer has value even to fellow Africans. The colonial administration has succeeded in taking away their male power. They have been commoditized and rated accordingly in death. Still, some of these men are brutally tortured to death. The men are branded and marked for death, probably because according to colonial administration they have outlived their usefulness. They are therefore hanged like common criminals:

Empty ropes hung endless circles of heavy and solid ropes, seventeen circles in all, dangling down and seventeen naked men on the ground waiting in circles. Life is drained out of the scalp. Life is pulled out of the body like a root. When a man falls free from the tree and still breathes, the knot is slowly released. He is pulled once more off the ground and yanked backed into the branches. A man can be hanged more than once. The first he watches himself die. He dies several times. Then something crushes into the roof of his head, his faith a wisp of flame thinner than life. Only a perfect circle can hang a man. Then death is sudden and quick (Butterfly, 13).

Even in death men suffer indignity and humiliation. Their carcasses are abandoned in the open. The situation of the black men in the world of Vera's novels is unbearable, challenging and dehumanizing.

### **Desperation for self-worth and Relevance**

As he thinks of his father who is among the seventeen dead men hanged by colonial administration, Fumbatha is distraught and pained. He feels worthless, hence his admiration for the silence of death. He observes, "Death is as intimate as love" (Butterfly, 13). He was born same year in which his father was hanged. The white masters turned him into a tormented man whose childhood was full of nightmares of his father:

In sleep Fumbatha drowns in the death of seventeen men. Each night, he listens to a cloud descending from the sky and pulling the bodies apart till their spirits are rent from their bodies. The birds feed on the dead but free them from eternal silence. The men borrow voices from the birds and speak in fluent sounds, clouds gather in the sky and there is heavy rain --- They leap in and their bodies race down the river like wood. Water swirls round the trunk on which the men have died. There is nothing we can do to save the dead, if they wake, whose life would make them whole again? (Butterfly, 14-15).

In both dream and consciousness, Fumbatha is a man under the siege of colonial masters. His subjugation hurts and haunts him. His oppression assigns him to an under-dog position that is both frustrating and torturous. In her presentation of Fumbatha, Vera describes a man whose life is empty. He has no fixed abode and therefore spends his nights beneath the debris and rubble under a company truck and the safety of its large wheels. With this description, Vera is telling us the magnitude of the suffering of a black man under the colonial systems. She says:

He is lying on his back with the empty khaki bags of cement for a pillow and a small grey blanket under his body. Sleep creeps up his body like a stream. He feels heavy, not just tired. The smell of cement has effect of pulling him down and pinning him to the ground. The shovel is beside him, the ax, the bricks, the rising dust, the arid sky above. And night comes like a thief, with a gentleness that caresses the eyes with gleaming broken rays which disappear into the horizon like sparks of flame into a lake, and then the shadow falls, and night, and then a sudden down pour of stars,,,,, when the night becomes too cold, he might creep under the lorry and the

safety of its large wheels. He sleeps under the Umguza River (Butterfly, 25-26).

This is a demonstration that Fumbatha, like a significant number of male protagonists in Vera's novels are victims of the colonial wrath, poverty and hard labour. In their hopeless situations, they grope around for power that would make them relevant as men in the patriarchal society which is itself crumbling under colonial assault. Fumbatha wonders about without any fixed aboard. His hard labour job only allows him to survive day by day. It is at his temporal shelter by the Umguza River where he meets Phephelaphi. His male power is quickly rejuvenated by her beauty and strength, "Phephelaphi was unaware of the manner in which she had by her presence, transformed him" (Butterfly, 26). He immediately took charge, telling her about the river while at the same time being grateful to it for giving her the woman, "it had given him this woman, spitting onto the rock like a dream. He waited fearful that he will wake and find her gone." (Butterfly, 27) Fumbatha is evidently grateful about his new status as a man being redeemed from a nightmare by some god of nature. His reward is Phephelaphi and he is not ready to let her go because instantly she has made his male instincts alive. He feels he has a duty to protect her and to own her as per the dictates of patriarchy. Unsure whether he should make enquiries, he asked her, "Where do you leave?" He asked as though to protect her (Butterfly, 28). The question that begs for answer here is, to protect her from who or what? Seemingly, Fumbatha wants Phephelaphi for himself to enable him fulfill his patriarchal obligations:

He never wanted to let her go even though they were strangers. He could never free her, even if she rose and disappeared once more into the water. He would remember her. He would hold her. Fumbatha had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet...Fumbatha had never met a woman who helped him forget each of his footsteps on this ground which he longed for (Butterfly, 29).

Vera engages the allegorical connection between the female body and the land to explain their capabilities of holding a man and providing for his most essential needs. For instance, Fumbatha is holding on to land because it links him to his ancestors to whom he owes his biological life while the land is responsible for his cultural life. Both land and woman are endowed with fertility and production capabilities, which are essential for a man's survival. Having lost the land to colonialists, Fumbatha is keen to have Phephelaphi as a kind of substitute. He is therefore determined to own and possess Phephelaphi, to make him forget his frustrations. Since African patriarchy gives immense respect to marriage institution, Fumbatha wants to use Phephelaphi to prove

his ability to 'own' and 'manage' a woman in order to portray his male authoritative power over a section of the society that is to be managed and ruled. This, he hopes would make him transcendent as a man. Juliet Mitchell (1974) contends that:

The father desires to be transcendent, to assert his will triumphantly, to be, in some sense of the term, "the Boss" he is ultimately capable of saying "I am who I am" .. He is clear thinking, farseeing, and powerful (Tong, 1989:170).

Leaning on Mitchell's view, I argue that the desire to be powerful or transcendent, to link up with his ancestors and those to be born made Fumbatha want to own Phephelaphi as a wife and become father to their children. I suggest that this is the reason why Fumbatha was very pained when Phephelaphi aborted their first child. After days of pain and avoiding Phephelaphi, Fumbatha finally asked her accusingly:

Last light of the evening on anything less important than her "you killed our child?"... His eyes raised mockingly, telling her without words that nothing could be more important than that and why was she wasting the betrayal. (Butterfly, 141).

Fumbatha's manhood is punctured again because his assumption that Phephelaphi is contented with what he provides for her has not turned into reality. I suggest that this is because being a complete adult human being; Phephelaphi too has her own plans which do not synchronize with those of Fumbatha. He would have wished to have total control over Phephelaphi so that she is subordinated to him. It is this notion of men about women that Marylin French (1985) argues about that:

Patriarchy is the paradigm par excellence for all modes of oppression; that sexism is prior to all "isms", including classism and racism. And that the oppression of women by men leads logically to further systems of domination (French, 1985).

Drawing from French's line of thought, I argue that a man who dominates a woman culturally wins the approval of the patriarchal society. Fumbatha is thus obsessed with the need to possess Phephelaphi in order to have refuge and to be relevant as a man in patriarchal order. He is therefore prepared to go to whatever extent to make Phephelaphi his own. In Phephelaphi, he envisages a possibility of reclaiming his patriarchal self, healing and settling down:

To find shelter, here was a woman who made Fumbatha finally relax his palms and look high up into the sky. He was no longer on guard. Here was life, water, and shelter of a kind. He could not argue with her shimmering presence. She gave him faith without her saying anything; he felt she had offered him a promise. Fumbatha was eager to begin, with her arrival he discovered a desperate fear, large and unnamable, which he could not abandon. It was he who needed refugee (Butterfly, 29).

Fumbatha's psychological wounds of manhood seem to have been cured by Phephelaphi. He finds a safety haven to dwell in, replacing the possession he lost to colonialists. He is physically and mentally pre-occupied with Phephelaphi as his only means to patriarchal glory. He is ready to use whatever strategy he can surmount to make her his own even as he doubts his own worth as a man. In a rhetorical question, he wonders if he possesses anything that commensurate her love. He puts it thus:

What could she love about him, what could she give to him without a loss to himself, without perishing beneath the stream. What words will he use to hold her and keep her still? An older man with his ankle held in a river .Who was he...? (Butterfly, 31)

It is clear that Fumbatha is well aware of his shortcomings and precarious position in the society. The colonial system has emasculated him so he is self-conscious that Phephelaphi may see through him and fail to love him. He equates loving her with losing oneself and self-destruction because he is an old dejected man who does not even know his true identity. I argue that Fumbatha's foreshadowing of Phephelaphi's self-destruction eventually came when he clings on her and stands between her and her dreams fulfillment. Fumbatha loves Phephelaphi because she says nothing about love (BB: 33). He simply wants to possess her for his own triumph as a man. He cares less about her progress and self-independence. He discourages her from sending an application for nursing training. He tells her:

We are happy together. I work. I take care of you. It is not necessary for you to find something else." He insists on her unwavering loyalty. He mistrusts the city which does not understand the sort of life the man and woman can find and share in their solitude. Does no one know that he is willing to die on the palm of Phephelaphi's hand (Butterfly, 70)

Fumbatha is ready to give his valueless life up for the ownership of Phephelaphi. For him, life without her will negatively impact on him, forcing him to be his old self, a

subjugated worthless man without an identity in the patriarchal society. He is therefore determined to put an end to Phephelaphi's movement forward and nothing will make him change his mind, not even Phephelaphi's logical reasoning . In her perception:

No one will come knocking on my door telling me to apply," she says to Fumbatha. "And if we do not apply, will anyone know that we are interested?" She asks...Her emotions are flurry of excitement and curiosity, she speaks to Fumbatha with a hopeful tone, believing that he will understand her immediately; he surprises her. Fumbatha forbids it," We have our lives together," he repeats (Butterfly, 71).

From his lowly placed position, Fumbatha is experiencing both physical and mental pressure to possess and regulate Phephelaphi's movement. He wants to control and hung on to Phephelaphi whom he now considers his woman. Because he is unable to move forward and transform his own life from that of a dominated oppressed labourer to a more significant man who is in control of his life, he can only make himself visible by stopping the vigor and agility of Phephelaphi in her quest for freedom and success. Fumbatha is fixated on possessing Phephelaphi as a means to mend his damaged male identity. He wants to suck away the goodness of her youth to better him. A feminist critic Mary Daly expounds this line of argument. For her, women posses some form of power that men feed on , making them grow thin ,weak , frail and even anorexic" (Daly, 1984:108). I argue that Men like Fumbatha feed on women's power to appear strong and relevant in patriarchal society. This is because such men have inferior male morality, which is associated with defeat and subjugation. According to Daly:

There are, "two types of morality; a superior female morality and an inferior male morality, but because she insists that when it comes to women, she whom the patriarch calls evil is in fact good, whereas, she whom the patriarch calls good is in fact bad. Thus if a woman is to escape the traps men have laid for her, if she is to assert her power ,to be all that she can , then she must realize that it is not good for her to sacrifice , deny and deprive herself for the sake of men and children in her life . It is good for a woman to be a hag. Hag is also defined as "an ugly or evil looking woman. But this, considering the source, maybe considered a compliment. For the beauty of strong, creative women is "ugly" by misogynistic standards of "beauty". The look of female -identified women is "evil" to those who fear us. As for "old" ageism is a feature of phallic society. For women who have transvaluated this, a crone is one who should be an example of strength, courage and wisdom (Daly 1984:107).

Phephelphi, being a strong intelligent woman instantly initiated change in Fumbatha. While she is oblivious to this change, Fumbatha is well and from his inferior position, if I may use Daly's words, is looking up to Phephelaphi for the transformation he very badly desires. In her thinking, a woman like Phephelaphi is a breed of superior female morality, the type that is able to cure Fumbatha's inferior male morality. I suggest that Fumbatha is unconsciously aware of this possibility, which explains why he marvels at Phephelaphi's visible qualities as a woman. He confesses that:

He had never met a woman who helped him forget each of his footsteps on this which he longed for. Here was a woman who made him notice that his feet were not on solid ground but on rapid and flowing water, and that this was a delight, that there was no harm ...Here was a woman who made Fumbatha finally relax his palms and look high up in the sky. He was no longer on guard (Butterfly, 29).

Fumbatha has found a pillar of strength in Phephelaphi to draw his strength from. She is beautiful and courageous and knows just what she wants in life. The same strength and courage that Fumbatha admires so much in Phephelaphi and hopes to use to turn his life around has proved to be a flaw for him when Phephelaphi used it to anchor her own dreams. This is a challenge to Fumbatha. My argument here is that the colonial subjugated men such as Fumbatha required different strategies to turn their lives around. A woman like Phephelaphi is neither ready to be Fumbatha's spring board to propel him back to patriarchal glory nor is she ready to be the pill for his masculinity. I further argue that though women in the hypothetical society that Vera writes about have not been given space for dialogue to express their needs and wants, they are conscious about them and are ready to even do the forbidden to get to their goals. Phephelaphi's path of transformation is in training as a nurse. Courageously she applies for the course against Fumbatha's discouragement. As if reading from the same script with Mary Daly, Phephelaphi refuses to deprive herself of the career opportunity for the sake of Fumbatha. She has chosen to be called 'bad' or 'ugly' by Fumbatha but assert herself to achieve her dream. When she gets pregnant again, she refuses to grapple with two major tasks of nursing a baby and pursuing her nursing career. She decides to kill Fumbatha's baby through self-inflicted abortion, which ends up killing her. Through this act Phephelaphi has demonstrated that she is her own person who is able to decide her own destiny. Her diversion from Fumbatha's path heralds the feminist thought that encourages women to walk away from patriarchal definitions and societal constructs of women. Though Vera's female protagonists employ the strategy of direct confrontation of their adversaries, the male protagonists have chosen a more



subtle way of resisting the powers that dominate them. In *Nehanda*, Vera's male characters are so much subdued that they no longer control, or even take care of women, in accordance to patriarchal expectations. Commenting on Simone de Beauvoir's development of the Sartrean thesis, man as self, woman as other in *The second sex*, Dorothy Kaufman Mccall observes thus:

If the "Other" is a threat to the self, then woman is a threat to man and if man wishes to remain free, he must subordinate woman to him. To be sure woman is not the only "Other" who knows oppression, blacks know what it is to be oppressed by whites and the poor know what it is to be oppressed by the rich (Kaufman, 1979:202).

Through the activities of her female characters, Vera highlights that women are not inferior. They can be sober leaders not just domestically but can also face international threat. I argue that *Nehanda* edged men of Zimbabwe from their usual power centre when she assumed the leadership role against the colonial forces. This challenge awakened the consciousness of men to view women as normal human beings who can perform competitively if given the opportunity. The Zimbabwean men vacated the power seat for *Nehanda* and took up less grueling tasks. This is evidenced in the person of men like Moses Mashoko; a native working for a Whiteman, Mr. Browning as a servant. Mashoko does not find his work interesting and feels ashamed when he is back in the village. Mr. Browning's attitude about the native is evident through his treatment of Moses. He thinks of him as a fool, an inferior being. After washing his face, Moses closes his eyes against the droplet until Mr. Browning has stopped splashing. "You can open your eyes now, Moses," Mr. Browning says. What a fool this Moses is, a real clown (*Nehanda*, 45) The white man has subjugated Moses, like other men in Zimbabwe. They are treated with contempt. The white man scoffs at even the elders. He laughed at them and their beliefs, telling them:

I will give you guns and teach you to pray to my God. He will strengthen you, and give you victory over your enemies. The things you believe are not true. Your ancestors cannot help you. My God is the only true God. He will bring you peace, wealth and happiness (*Nehanda*, 38)

The Whiteman has exercised the machinations of his power over the black man. With his superior power, he has stripped the black men of everything including their beliefs and practices as well as their dignity. They are mistrusted and treated like children who need protection from the queen; a white woman:

.....I shall read everything to you and you will see that it is very clear. I am a messenger of the queen. The queen is like your “Mwari”. She protects and wishes to extend her protection over you. I shall give you guns with which to fight your enemies. In return my people will be allowed to search for gold. You can trust me” (Nehanda, 39)

Having realized that they have become desperate and powerless, the men turned to Nehanda, a woman whom they believed to possess spiritual power for leadership. Their women are left without “protection” and dangerously exposed. Nehanda’s authoritative speech as she gives direction on how to confront the colonial forces has removed the patriarchal mask from the eyes of men. They have demonstrated this by kneeling before Nehanda as the other women stretch their protective arms around them. This in the thoughts of Foucault on power is authenticating the fact that every individual has power and can exercise it regardless of their gender. The women, including Nehanda are forced by prevailing circumstances to get out of the kitchen and take up the roles traditionally meant for men. They are compelled by their motherly instincts to protect their children even when they know their efforts are futile. They suffer and face persecution on the hands of the white man because their men who should have offered them protection have succumbed to defeat from the Whiteman. Vera heralds the efforts of the women. For her, one must never succumb to defeat because survival is in fighting for space and voice. Through the actions of these women, Vera is making a statement that women’s struggle for freedom is transversal and does not depend on man’s leadership. They are not ready to go down with their men; they are determined to face the white man’s authority and challenge it. Vera’s thoughts are in tandem with Julia Kristeva’s refusal to identify the “feminine “with biological women, and the “masculine” with biological men. Kristeva argues thus:

If a child has the choice, upon entry into the symbolic order, of identifying with either the mother or the father, and if the extent of the child’s masculinity or femininity depends on the extent of this identification , then children of both sexes have the same choices open to them. Boys can identify with their mothers and girls can identify with their fathers...to collapse language into biology, to insist that simply because of their anatomy, women write differently than men is to force men and women, once again, into patriarchy’s straight jacket...”Woman as such does not exist”. Such concepts as “woman” and “the feminine” are rooted in metaphysics, the essentialist philosophy that deconstruction seeks to deconstruct. The belief that “one is a woman” is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that “one is a man” (Kristeva, 1982).

The thinking of Vera resonates well with Kristeva's that biological determination has nothing to do with one's limitation and capability. The women in Vera's novels such as Nehanda have proved that their quest for freedom and autonomy is not dependent on their biological determination. Their revolutionary powers do not depend on patriarchal's goodwill. If patriarchy cannot protect them from the political, social and economic exploitation of the white man, then they usurp the power and protect not only themselves but also the men who seem to have submitted to the authority of the white man. The aftermath of male submission is of special interest to Vera. She continually draws correspondences between the immoral actions of the men and the prevailing sordid situations of city life. In her novels, Vera amplifies how the actions of the men are part of the societal malaise. In *Under the Tongue*, Vera explores the dehumanizing tendency of the social condition instituted by the colonial system and post-colonial policies. The men have become captives of the system and no longer enjoy their patriarchal space. They seek a revert route to remain relevant in their patriarchal kingdoms. Their easy preys are the women in whom they vent their frustrations and pains. Muroyiwa, for instance, is a man haunted by the myth surrounding his own birth. The fact that his mother talks of having retrieved him from a calabash makes him feel belittled and constantly threatened by its living conditions. The mother claims that he had died at birth and resurrected the following morning hence his name Muroiywa:

Folded into a calabash, ready for the burial which would occur in the early morning, but Muroyiwa rose too with the morning....the women could not burry him. They were not joyous either; they preferred him not to live. This was clear throughout his life. To absolve everyone of any malice in wishing him death, Muroyiwa quickly assumed that death was better than life...it was this which made living tolerable, the constancy of death. Life tantalized him with its promises of an ultimate and reachable fulfillment (*Under the Tongue*, 128).

Muroyiwa's birth and death puzzle throws his mind into a dilemmic state. He is a tortured frustrated man. He is a tormented man who feels rejected by the society. He lives under the shadows of death which to him is more promising than the degrading life he lives. The bitter truth is that he has no honor to cherish and protect. In order to survive and make life tolerable, Muroyiwa reduced death to a shade of sleep. He was determined to reclaim his life, which he attempted at the time of war. Vera observes that:

When he first understood the meaning of his name, Muroyiwa could no longer escape from life. This he considered during the war when he allowed himself to be haunted by beauty and loving and the symmetry of mats, then he forgot about the war, or at least he fought its encroachment. The war made him see clearly the objects he wanted to see. It was like seeing thunder when the sky is black with rain. Muroyiwa was not blind to lightning, it's tantalizing beauties. War was black like the sky; beauty purified war. Then a desperate passion engaged him and would not let him free ...he discovered the anxiety of death linked with the waiting that accompanied war. It was the waiting he fought against more than the war itself. He conceived a strategy to fight against waiting. This came in the pursuit of a limitless charm of living. When he thought further on this desire he saw that such charm would not be found simply anywhere, but would be embodied in a form, perhaps that of a woman (Under the Tongue, 129).

In his waiting for death, Muroyiwa is determined to live for the moment and enjoy. He then visualized the object of his desire as embodied in the form of a woman; a woman becomes a means through which to get back to his patriarchal glory hence his obsession. In his quest to satiate this obsession, Muroyiwa oversteps the threshold of filial relationships and repeatedly violates Zhizha, his biological daughter. The impact of Muroyiwa's incestuous violation is depicted through the fear and vulnerability experienced by Zhizha. She says:

I hide under my tongue. I hide deep in the dark inside of myself where no one has visited, where it is warm like blood. Night waits for my cry but I can only think of my knee bending slowly, painfully, touching the something, the nothing rising above my head, rising from my arms. I know this nothing is something. I hear the door close (Under the Tongue, 21).

While Vera's male characters like Muroyiwa are compelled by the conditions they live in to engage in sadistic behaviors that precipitate into bizarre actions like repeatedly raping one's own daughter, the female characters, in their traumatized psyches, have to either contend with such behaviors in silence or commit acts that deviate from societal norms such as murder, as a means of voicing their hurt and asserting the self. The traumatic experience of Zhizha is so deep that it gets lodged in her psyche; confusing her and causing a breach or rupture in her powers of presentation. Symbolically, the world of young Zhizha has fallen apart, causing tears of grief not only to her mother but

also to her grandmother. The women just can't comprehend why a man would rape his own daughter. In such scenarios, Susan Brownmiller (1975) says that:

The male ideology of rape is a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear..... To be a man means to reaffirm consciously one's identity by oppressing, repressing and suppressing women. Furthermore, it is not only that men are socialized into this role...this power over women actually defines men. It is the essence of manhood (Brownmiller, 1975).

Muroyiwa, a man born in frustrations and lived under difficult conditions needed to redefine himself to redeem his manhood. As Brownmiller would put it, Muroyiwa had to rape a woman, his own daughter, to inflict fear in her and all the women around him, oppressing, repressing and suppressing them in order to affirm his power over them. The visceral force with which Zhizha's pain confronts Runyararo, Zhizha's mother, is so high that Runyararo becomes neurotic and kills her husband to avenge her daughter's traumatic pain. Muroiywa's scheme to use his daughter, a woman as a spring board to manhood has not only failed him but also caused his premature demise. Though the shame associated with domestic violence, rape and other forms of indignity meted out on women persist despite their fight, Vera, through Runyararo, is saying that women can be assertive, courageous and strong. This poses a big challenge to the subjugated men's scheme of oppressing women in order to prove their capability in patriarchy. Muroyiwa's quest for power has brought him to a disgraceful shameful end. Runyararo says; I will bury him like a dog...I will not bury him but throw him away just like a dead lizard (*Under the Tongue*, 152).

### **Self-Exorcism and Patriarchal Relevance**

In *Without a Name*, Vera presents men like Nyenyedzi and Joel. She insinuates that women must reject these men because beneath their physical expression of sexual desires, they possess inner 'wounds' that are chronic. To them, the women offer the escape route to their patriarchal relevance after their subjugation and humiliation by the colonial systems. For Yvonne Vera, the weight of history's challenges falls upon women. Men whose historical backgrounds are excruciatingly painful are culturally drawn to women's bodies for self-exorcism and patriarchal relevance. Nyenyedzi, like most male characters in the worlds of Vera's novels, is a man in the shadows of life. He is beaten and downtrodden by the all-powerful colonial regime. His survival depends on hard labour that does not commensurate with the remuneration he receives:

We are servants paid poorly for our labour. We cannot decide which crop to grow, or when to grow it. We do not pray for the success of our crop because it is no longer our crop. We cannot pray for another's crop. There are no rituals of harvest, of planting the crop into the ground. We labor because it is our task to labour. We do not own the land. The land is enclosed in barbed fences and we sleep amid the thorn bushes, in the barren part of the land. We live in fear because even those who fight in our name threaten our lives (Without a Name, 39).

Nostalgically, Nyenyedzi takes cognizance of his servant position in his own society. He reminisces about the past realities of their farming activities with a resigned sigh. He has, unwillingly moved to the periphery of the patriarchal power centre. He is a man under siege, afraid and scared of his own country men who purport to fight for them but who no longer respect their humanity and existence. To reclaim the confident self as a man in his patriarchal society, he has to possess, dominate and subjugate a woman. In her analysis, Marylenn French (1985) believe that patriarchy is the 'sine qua non' for oppression to sustain 'power over'. She argues that:

With man's desire to control the monolith "woman/nature" was born patriarchy, a hierarchical system that values power over originally developed to ensure the human community's survival, power-over rapidly became, under patriarchy, a value cultivated simply for the experience of being the person in charge, the law giver, the "boss", number one in the "pecking order".(French 1985:99).

Nyenyedzi's move was to possess Mazvita, to make her belong to him, to replace the land he had lost. His patriarchal instinct compels him to have power over a woman. While he rejects her proposal to leave with her for the city, he also does not want to let her go. Nyenyedzi is a man in dilemma. He is torn between going away with the woman he wants to possess and staying, elusively holding onto the land he no longer owns. The pain of losing the land to the colonialists is so intense that it haunts him. His denial to the fact that the land no longer belongs to him makes him a captive. He says:

The land belongs to our feet because only they can carry the land. It is only our feet which own the land. Our hands can only carry clods of earth at a time. We cannot carry the land on our shoulders. No one can take the land away. To move away from the land is to admit that it has been taken. It is to abandon it. We have to wait here. We have to wait with the land, if

we are to be loyal to it and to those who have given it to us (Without a Name, 38).

Nyenyedzi's mind is fixed on the land and wants Mazvita to share in his dreams. He wants to possess her and stop her from her quest for freedom and independence. Nyenyedzi, in his frustration to hold to Mazvita, compares her assertiveness and quest with that of the colonialists:

You lack patience and hope, Mazvita, you want things to belong to you, just like the stranger does. You want to possess, to hold things between your hands and say they belong to you. You do not see that things belong to you not because you have held them, but because they have held you. It is like that with the land. It holds and claims you. The land is inescapable. It is everything. Without the land there is no day or night, there is no dream. The land defines our unities. There is no prayer that reaches our ancestors without blessing from the land. Land is birth and death. If we agree that the land has forgotten us, then we agree to be dead (Without a Name, 39-40).

Mazvita refused to share Nyenyedzi's perspective because she has her own; a fact that he does not see because he takes her to be inferior and incapable of thinking independently. Her determination to move on and get her reality and truth became stronger than her need to stay with Nyenyedzi. Mazvita has worked out a plan towards her goal. She is on her way to redefine herself for all to see her transformation. Unlike Nyenyedzi who is stuck in his frustrated present and still looking for a gullible woman to help him revert to patriarchal manhood, Mazvita chooses to move for progress. Mazvita's thought resonate with Simone de Beauvoir's (1974) perspective on the trajectory a woman should embrace. She insists that, "women must see themselves as autonomous beings and reject the societal constructs that men are the subjects or the absolute and women are the "Other" (Beauvoir, 1974:173.) In Zimbabwe, the authority of the subject has been usurped by the colonial administration, leaving the native man to occupy the position of what Beauvoir calls the "Other". Nyenyedzi's position is too precarious to enable him stop Mazvita. True to Beauvoir's line of thinking, Mazvita sees herself as an independent being, charting her own path in life. She has sensed Nyenyedzi's intention to control, possess and dominate her for his own good, and decided to reject it.

With a traumatic past that is marked with war, destruction and rape, Mazvita's quest for freedom is so great that Nyenyedzi cannot stop her. Her traumatizing experience of rape by a soldier still occupies a large part of her psyche. Her mind is

being clouded and just cannot fathom the extent to which the historical events have affected the personalities of the men, their outlook to life, coupled with their moral behavior. The black men seem to be victims of the Whiteman's rule. They work under the white man's surveillance: toiling and making sacrifices, which are neither appreciated nor duly rewarded because the work is not their own, it is summoned. The rapist soldier, for instance, is a man fighting a war that he does not understand. Instead of protecting his motherland, he has been instrumentalized to protect the interest of the colonial masters. The soldier is a subjugated man who submits to authority forms. He is an instrument of war against his own people. The destructive powers of war have so much permeated his humanity that he has lost the moral fiber of the self. Like Sibaso in *The Stone Virgins*, the strange soldier transmits his hurt into Mazvita so as to prove his worth as a man in the kind of society he lives in. At the height of civil war, a guerilla arrives in Mazvita's village of Mhondoro, burns the whole village and rapes Mazvita. In her traumatized memory, Mazvita relives her rape ordeal; the stranger had claimed her, told her that she could not hide the things of her body from him which he eventually did. Shocked and afraid, Mazvita loathes her rapist. In his thinking, the guerrilla rapist desires a treatment that befits a king, an all-powerful person. He desires attention from a woman. He wants to have power over her, subjugate and oppress her. She must kneel so that "he drinks water from her cupped hands". His desire is to grab her innocence, make her his in order to feel contented as a man. He wants Mazvita to exalt and worship him as he rapes her. Despite employing silence as a trope of resistance, the gorilla got through to her very core of being:

He reached for her back and she lay motionless, unaware that she still had a name that was hers. She had discovered the silence to keep his breathing from her back. 'Hauzvadzi'...he said. You are my sister.....he whispered. He did not shout or raise his voice but invited her to lie still in a hushed but serious rhythm. His voice was monotonous, low, but firmly held in his mouth, in his arms. He spoke in a tone trained to be understood, not heard. Mazvita fought to silence his whispering. The task nearly killed her.... She could not always recognize all the words, and when she did, her effort was to quickly gather them into that distance she had prepared inside of her. She longed deeply for the silence to be complete. She longed to escape the insistent cries of his triumph (Without a Name, 35).

In his confusion, the guerilla raped Mazvita to redefine himself as a man in control over others especially women. He has taken advantage of his training as a soldier, to demand and get his way. It is not lost to him that here; he is the man, the conqueror and the



subject because he has triumphed over her. The guerilla's actions reflect what French (1985) refers to in *Beyond power* as:

'true grit', that is 'doing what you have to do', and 'the end justifying the means', but no room for 'knowing when to stop', savoring the 'best things in life', or reflecting on process as well as product. Thus, to be a total man, or patriarch, is not to be a full human being but to be a minotaur- "(the) gigantic and eternally infantile offspring of a mother's unnatural lust, (the) male representative of mindless, greedy power,(who) insatiably devours live human flesh"( French 1985:100).

The guerilla devoured Mazvita's flesh, traumatized her psyche and shattered her entire life through a mindless power greed act of rape, just to prove himself as patriarch and to heal his war wounds from the colonial administration.

#### 4.5 Colonial Power and Male Instrumentalisation

In *The Stone Virgins*, one gets the underlying argument that the problems of the human society are as a result of the insatiable desire to appropriate power over the perceived insignificant others in the society. The power quest is a vicious circle that neither has a beginning nor an end. Vera in her writing is appealing to the society to change her perspective about power play. By discussing both men and women's activities side by side, she is challenging the society into accepting that the gains of power depends on individual players and not gender. The city laborers, as Vera refers to the black workers, are men charged with responsibility of propping up the colonial economies of both Rhodesia and South Africa. They are said to voyage back and forth between Bulawayo and Johannesburg and hold the city up like a beacon. Though the work is not their own, they give it their all. It is said that:

They have been dipped deep in the gold mines, helmeted, torch lit, plummeted, digging for that precious gold which is not theirs. Not at all. They are not only black; they are outsiders. They make no claim. This is paid work, so they do it. Egoli.. They say and sigh....about Johannesburg...They are nostalgic and harbor a self-satisfied weariness that belongs to those who pursue divine wishes...Who possess the sort of patience required to graft lemon trees and orange trees and make a new and sour crop (*Stone Virgins*, 5-6).

The men are frustrated and fatigued. Though their labour is exploited, they cannot quit because they work under surveillance of the colonial authority. They are subjugated men, men without honour and dignity. Vera describes them:

Impatient, ready to depart. .. Uneasy, almost ready to return to Jo'burg empty handed, to work there with appetite, with that steady easy zeal which accompanies anything temporary. Ready to sleep under the most luminous streetlights, to find places where they can bury their hurt and make love to new women while the sound of pennywhistles and bicycle tires sliding on tar urges them. And anonymity (Stone Virgins, 6).

The men are afraid of the public eye. They hide their indignation at the mines and under streetlights. They make love to women not out of love but to bury their hurt, to make them dominate and feel powerful. They use women for their selfish desires and hurt them in the process. Like the labourers, men who fought at the war are equally dehumanized and subjugated. Their subjugation to authority forms act as catalysts to women's oppression and domination. In her own subtle way, Vera discusses the theme of male damage. She talks of war damaged men around Thandabantu stores, who wear lonely and lost looks, and guard their loneliness, remaining psychologically untouchable by the women who in their naivety, surround them to feel important:

These young women approach Thandabantu store with a new purposeful gaiety. They do all they can to discover what their own harrowing impatience is about, and can it be halted, somehow? Can it be stilled and satisfied? Freely and willingly they slide beside men as old as their eldest brothers, who have returned from the war with all their senses intact, except for that faraway, traveled look that makes the girls a bit fearful, a bit dizzy, a bit excited, that makes them feel brave, as though they are sliding their hands in the cotton soft coolness of ash, where, it is possible, a flame might sparkle and burn.....They wear lonely and lost looks but have a touch wild as honey....they guard their loneliness.....The women worship these men who lead them all the way to the final place they want to be and which has long been in their minds (Stone Virgins, 53-54).

The hurt of these men is so deep that the women cannot reach. They are unaware of the deep wounds harbored by these men. They are also not aware that their love making is simply physical, choreographed to revamp these frustrated men with power over, to control and conquer. The absolute reality about these men downs on the women after committing themselves into relationships with the men. The involvement

gives the women opportunity to know the men better. In the Stone Virgins, we learn that the women are able to watch these men in their troubled sleep and witness their fights with people who are only real in their dream worlds. Out of empathy, the women find themselves staying with these men longer than their initial expectations because they feel guilty leaving them to their haunted dreams. Nonetheless, the women get frightened and destroyed because they sacrifice their freedom for the relationships. They realize that they can neither cure the loneliness that lurks in the men's eyes nor exorcise their past actions that haunt their sleep, but they stick with them in honour of their cultural orientations to please men no matter what. These ex-soldiers are victims of a continent torn by war. They are deeply troubled and plagued by recurring war nightmares. They are political dissenters. One of them is Sibaso, a man whose narrative is given in retrospective fragments. Sibaso confesses that he is able to accumulate "forty thousand years...in memory and travel four hundred years, then ten thousand years, then twenty more" (Stone Virgins, 104). What Sibaso experiences as an exhilarating freedom based on isolation and absence of authority is in actual sense the expression of a static version of history that becomes a form of confinement:

"On the rocks, history is steady; it cannot be tilted forward or backward"  
History has a "ceiling" under which the soldier crouches, unable to raise himself fully, and he becomes an "embodiment of time" from which he cannot escape (Stone Virgins, 83).

Men like Sibaso are trapped in a history that is hurtful. In their service under the powerful authority of the colonial rule, they are not able to revert to the patriarchal self in conformity to the patriarchal cultures. Sibaso's personality and behavior are depictions of male subjugation to authority forms. His aggression is the vehicle through which the structure of authority that contains confines and silences women is perpetuated. The woman becomes the perfect object of men's aggression. Sibaso's scalded mind leads him to Thenjiwe and Nonceba, two sisters whom he intends to violently subjugate as a remedy to his own subjugation and domination by the instruments of colonial administration, including the war for independence. The way in which Sibaso executes his rape and murder events is excruciatingly cruel and inhuman. As he continues with his search for something in her body that he can break, Nonceba's protest in mind is infinite:

Between them is an absence measured by pauses and suspicious silences. Perhaps, in one of these absences, he may recover and feel something a kin to kindness, not pity. It is remote, pity, in a man like this. He may

forget why he is here, why she is with him, who she is. He too, may be stunned by his own dramatic presence (Stone Virgins, 67).

It is clear that Sibaso is a sick man psychologically. In his sickness, determination to complete his ordeal is high and has no room for change of mind. Instead, he commands her, "sit here, on my knee". He moves away briefly, carefully, and then returns his touch to her body. He returns his touch as though it were something he has taken away without permission, guiltily, yet like a kind act (Stone Virgins, 68). Sibaso's tortured mind, which evidently carries the heaviness of history's contradictions, claims its focus upon Nonceba's body. In his confused state of mind, he perceives his behavior as an act of kindness. The power of his masculinity over her femininity is manifested as he mercilessly enters her body like a vacuum. She can do nothing to save herself from his brutality:

He clutches her from the waist, his entire hand resting boldly over her stomach. He presses down. He pulls her to him....He forces her down. She yields. She is leaning backward into his body. He holds her body like a bent stem. He draws her waist into the curve of his arm. She is moulded into the shape of his waiting arm- a tendril on a hard rock. He is at the pit of her being....His arm is moist, warm, the scent rising from each of his motions is a thick paste of desire. He pulls her body and holds her still. As suddenly, her thighs feel pain, a hot liquid coursing down to her own knees. He draws her entire body into his own. Mute. He is a predator, with all the fine instincts of annihilation. She, the dead, with all the instincts of the vanquished (Stone Virgins, 68).

Nonceba regains her stance only to find herself in a deep stupor. She feels she is nothing to him, just an aftermath to his desire. Like a zombie, Nonceba follows his commands. She tastes him through a forced kiss. Coming face to face with her present reality, that escape from the man is an illusion; she plays along in order not to provoke his anger further. She uses this as a strategy to learn his moves and to weigh her escape options. She learns that Sibaso has a derailed mind. He seems to possess some form of bitterness that makes him see her as an object he can just manipulate. Sibaso evidently takes pleasure in bullying Nonceba, treating her like a useless object, torturing and humiliating her. He is exercising a form of power over Nonceba; the kind of power, which according to Michel Foucault, is power that subjugates, controls and makes subject to (Foucault 1984:781).

It is evident that Sibaso is trying to clean his own 'wound' and heal his conscience so as to command respect in the society. This event of rape is torturing and tormenting.

While Sibaso behaves with utmost ruthlessness intended for her total destruction, Nonceba is completely at his mercy, feeling totally destroyed and psychologically dead. When she discovers that her sister Thenjiwe has been murdered by Sibaso, Nonceba gets horrified. The beheading of Thenjiwe is described from her point of view thus:

His head is behind Thenjiwe, where Thenjiwe was before, floating in her body; he is in her body. He is floating like a flash of lightning. Thenjiwe's body remains upright while this man's head emerges behind hers, inside it, replacing each of her moments, taking her position in the azure of the sky. He is absorbing Thenjiwe's motion into his own body, existing where Thenjiwe was, moving into the spaces she has occupied (Stone Virgins, 73).

Nonceba passes out after the rape and mutilation of her lips. Though her aunt and uncle, her shocked and wounded state take her to the hospital push the boundaries of her psyche to near collapse, and she vividly imagines her sister's presence and incorporates the voices of fellow patients, imagining their horrors. Sibaso's action is in dialogic to his earlier despair which succeeded an initial compliance with commanders' orders. In his mind, he "thinks" of scars inflicted before dying, betrayals before a war, after a war and declares, "Everything I fear has already happened", while at independence he feels nothing but the sensation. "I walk. Nothing matters". (Stone Virgins, 108) The way in which Sibaso has murdered Thenjiwe and violated Nonceba is from his perspective described as a 'natural' pattern of action provoked by the war. During the war Sibaso has lost a significant part of his being, his name and he has become a lifeless envoy of destruction of sensibilities of life. Looked at from this perspective, his murder of Thenjiwe and rape of Nonceba appear as the outcome of a world that is inhumanly torn by wars. His name, Sibaso, is a testimony to his orientation as a soldier during the war:

He has been instrumentalized and dehumanized to serve a destructive purpose of the war. Sibaso perceives himself as an instrument of war that has lost even the sight of pity, to both him and other human beings. He is a dissident hunted by the government forces and feared by the civilians. He is in hiding as he tries to restore his world view which has been distorted by the war and social chaos of Gukurahundi (Stone Virgins, 94-95).

With his subsequent actions, Sibaso displays evidence of split personality. After subjecting Nonceba to torture, desperation and humiliation, he offers her a shoulder to

lean on. He has demonstrated this through his child-like treatment of Nonceba. He realizes that her vulnerability requires some softness. He cradles her like a wounded child. Nonceba almost believes him, in him, almost removes him and his lullaby from this scene, almost. He offers words that could heal. He closes his eyes and moves his lips against her neck. His words flood her earlobes, slip between her legs, where her blood falls like burnt water. She feels it. He could heal her, shield her with his body. He just could (Stone Virgins, 71). The image of Sibaso cradling Nonceba like a wounded child soon after a cruel act of damaging and invading her being is a reflection of his inner craving for affection and family that he never had. His mother died in childbirth (Stone Virgin, 107). Sibaso who was only around eighteen or nineteen years when the war started, became very lonely when it ended after fourteen years. He cannot find the father he goes back to seek, instead he obtains only confusing information that his father possibly died in prison where he was detained because he (Sibaso) had joined the liberation forces.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined Vera's presentation of the male character whose subjugation and frustration is the cause of domination and subjugation of the female characters. The man referred to in this chapter as the subjugated man is a man who has lost to the colonial masters; his culture, his personality and dignity. In his attempt to get back his lost patriarchal glory, he projects his frustration and bitterness on those perceived weaker, the woman. The woman suffers the brunt of the problems of men, who in the cause of their power play, end up destroying the women as well as themselves.

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